



History Departments and the National Student Survey



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INTRODUCTION

The following report presents results from an analysis of the 2009 National Student Survey (NSS). The analysis proceeded through the aggregation of a number of sub-categories from the NSS dataset: history, humanities, overall, institutional grouping and institutional region. On the basis of these aggregations, average results for these sub-categories were generated.

This report aims to present these averages in a comparative fashion so as to understand the relative student perceptions of history departments across all institutions, particular strengths and weaknesses suggested by the NSS results and any patterning in these respects which is identifiable across different institutional groupings and regions of the country.

The NSS encompasses 22 questions grouped into 7 scales. Each question offers five choices from “definitely agree” to “definitely disagree”, as well as “not applicable”. These are scored numerically from 1 to 5. Though the survey also includes a small qualitative component (allowing respondents to record ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ features which they would like to highlight) it is the aforementioned quantitative component that the present analysis addresses. Figure 1 presents the content of the scales and questions.



¹ A further 6 questions asked only to NHS funded students are excluded from this analysis.

Figure 1: NSS Scale and Question Content

Scale	Question	Question Content
1 Teaching and Learning	1	Staff are good at explaining things.
	2	Staff have made the subject interesting.
	3	Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.
	4	The course is intellectually stimulating.
2 Assessment and Feedback	5	The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
	6	Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.
	7	Feedback on my work has been prompt.
	8	I have received detailed comments on my work.
	9	Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.
3 Academic Support	10	I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.
	11	I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
	12	Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.
4 Organization and Management	13	The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.
	14	Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.
	15	The course is well organized and is running smoothly.
5 Learning Resources	16	The library resources and services are good enough for my needs.
	17	I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to.
	18	I have been able to access specialized equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to.
6 Personal Development	19	The course has helped me present myself with confidence.
	20	My communication skills have improved.
	21	As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.
7 Overall Satisfaction	22	Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

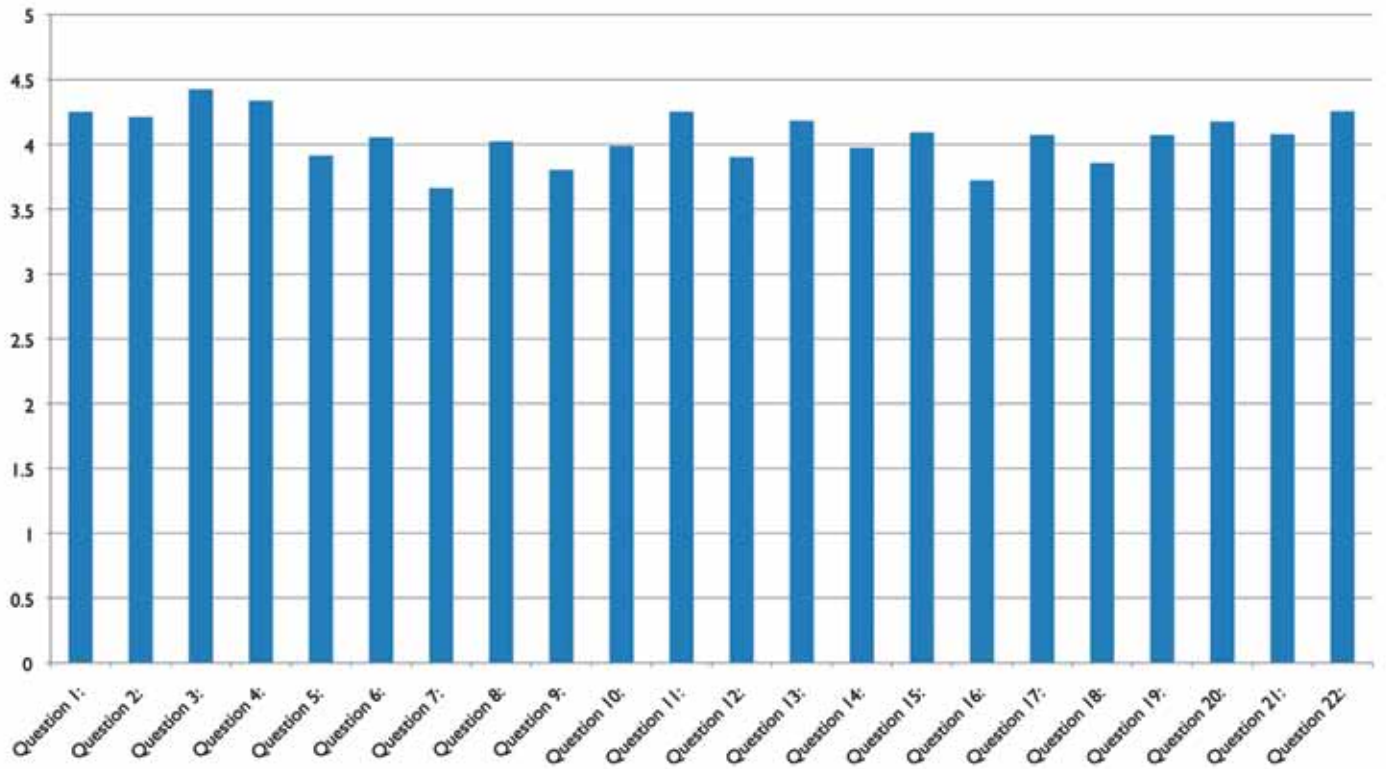
1.1. OVERALL HISTORY RESULTS

This section presents average results for history departments calculated from the aggregate of all history scores on the NSS. Figure 2 illustrates average score per question across all history departments.

The five highest average scores are achieved for questions 1, 3, 4, 11 and 22. These are respectively:

- “Staff are good at explaining things”
- “Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”
- “The course is intellectually stimulating”
- “I have been able to contact staff when I needed to”
- “Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”

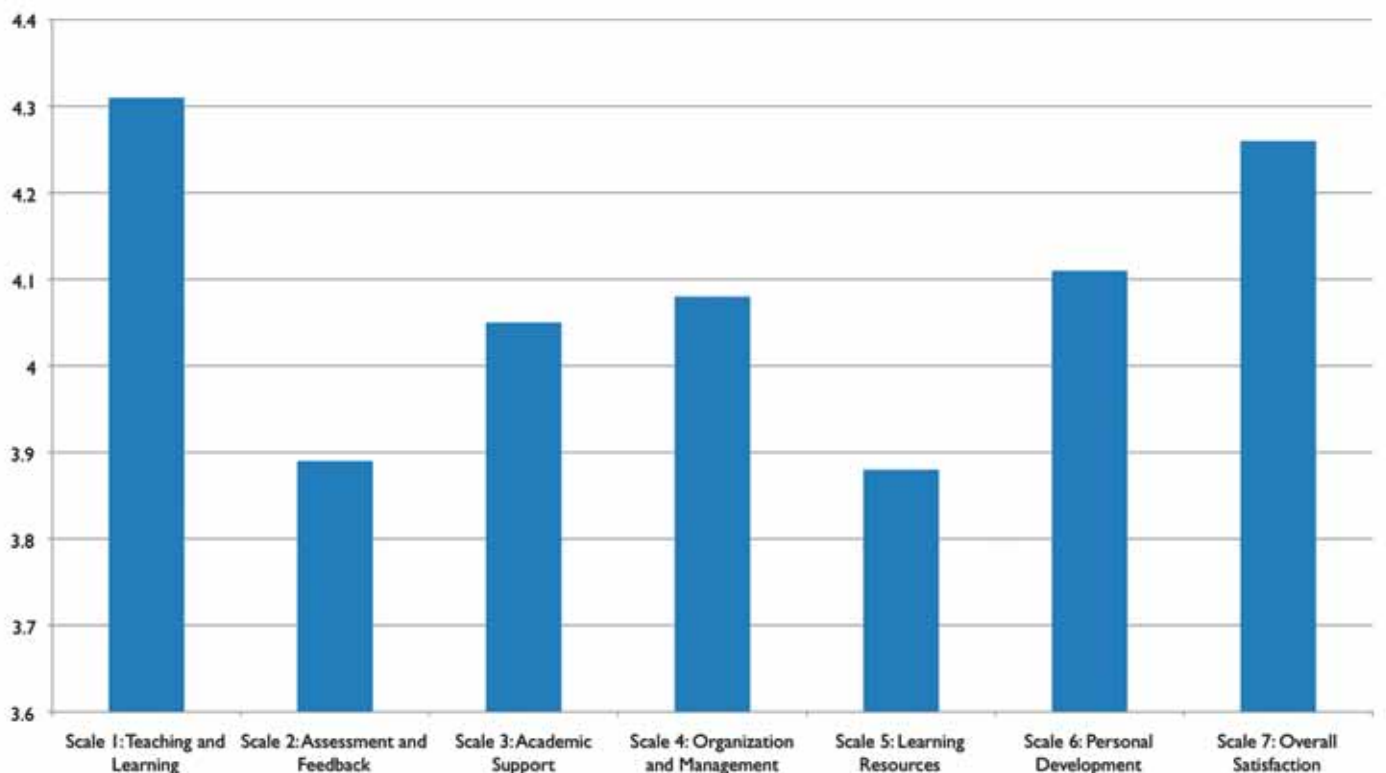
Figure 2: Average Score for History Departments by Question



As can be seen in Figure 3 three of the five highest scores are in scale 1, which is the highest scoring of the 7 scales, suggesting “Teaching and learning” as a particular strength that obtains across all history departments.

It is notable that scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”) is the second highest average scale score, suggesting a widespread satisfaction on the part of history students. The lowest scores are received on question 7 (“Feedback on my work has been prompt”) and question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”).

Figure 3: Average Score for History Departments by Scale



1.2. HISTORY RESULTS COMPARED TO HUMANITIES RESULTS

This section offers a comparative presentation of average history results and average results for the humanities overall. There is no clearly defined Humanities sub-category on the NSS. For the purposes of this analysis, humanities were taken to be constituted by the following subject and disciplinary categories from the NSS. The first two were included because they shared this category with History, rather than by utilizing the general disciplinary category. The following seven are disciplinary categories encompassing a number of distinct subjects.

1. Archaeology
2. Others in Historical and Philosophical Studies
3. English-based studies
4. European Languages and Area studies
5. Other Languages and Area studies
6. Philosophy, Theology and Religious studies
7. Art and Design
8. Performing Arts
9. Other Creative Arts

Figure 4 represents the average history results by question against average humanities results by question.

History averages stand above the humanities average on all but question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”) and question 17 (“I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to”). Given that the same results are repeated in the comparison of history averages and overall NSS averages (see figure 6 in section 1.4) this result is particularly striking and suggestive of a pervasive underlying difficulty perceived by history students.

Particular strengths relative to humanities can be seen in questions relating to teaching and learning (particularly “This course is intellectually stimulating”) and organization and management (particularly “The course is well organized and is running smoothly”). These results suggest that the perception of institutional resource provision does not meet the high standards established in the teaching and management of history departments.

Figure 4: Comparison of History and Humanities Averages by Questions

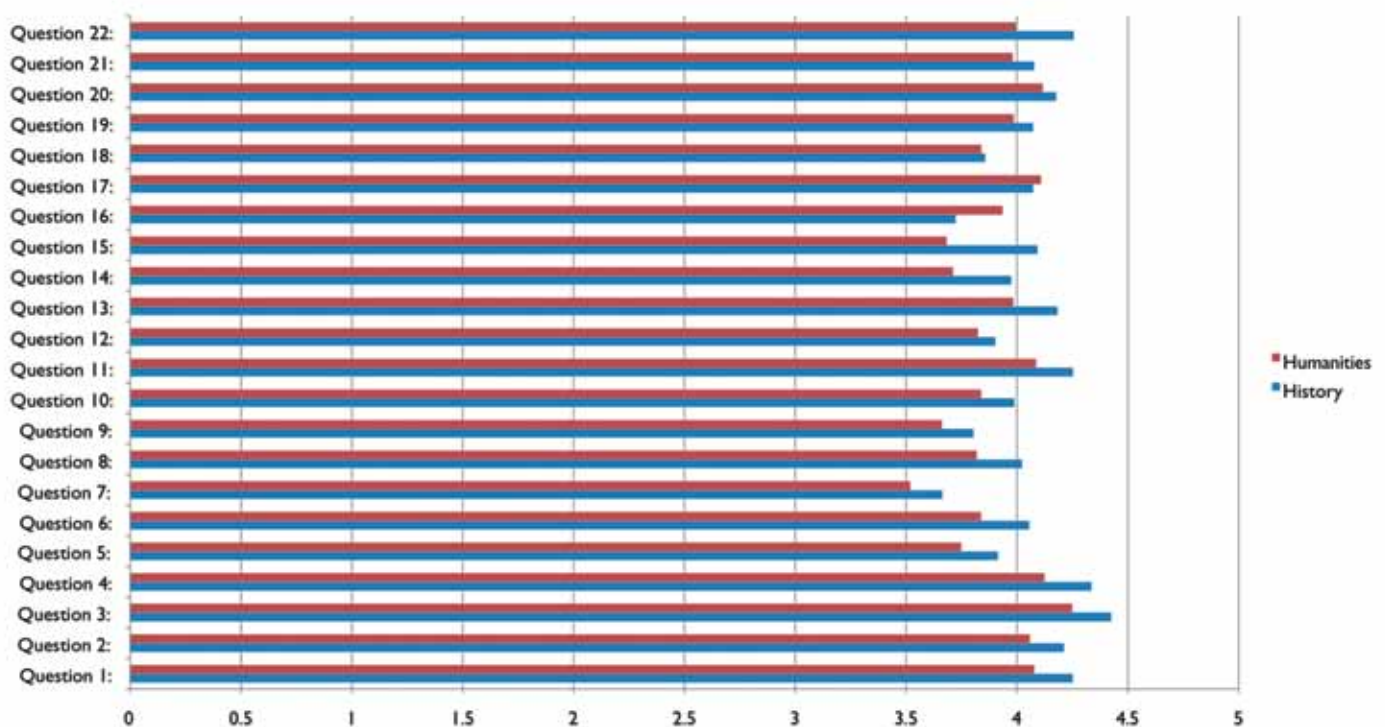
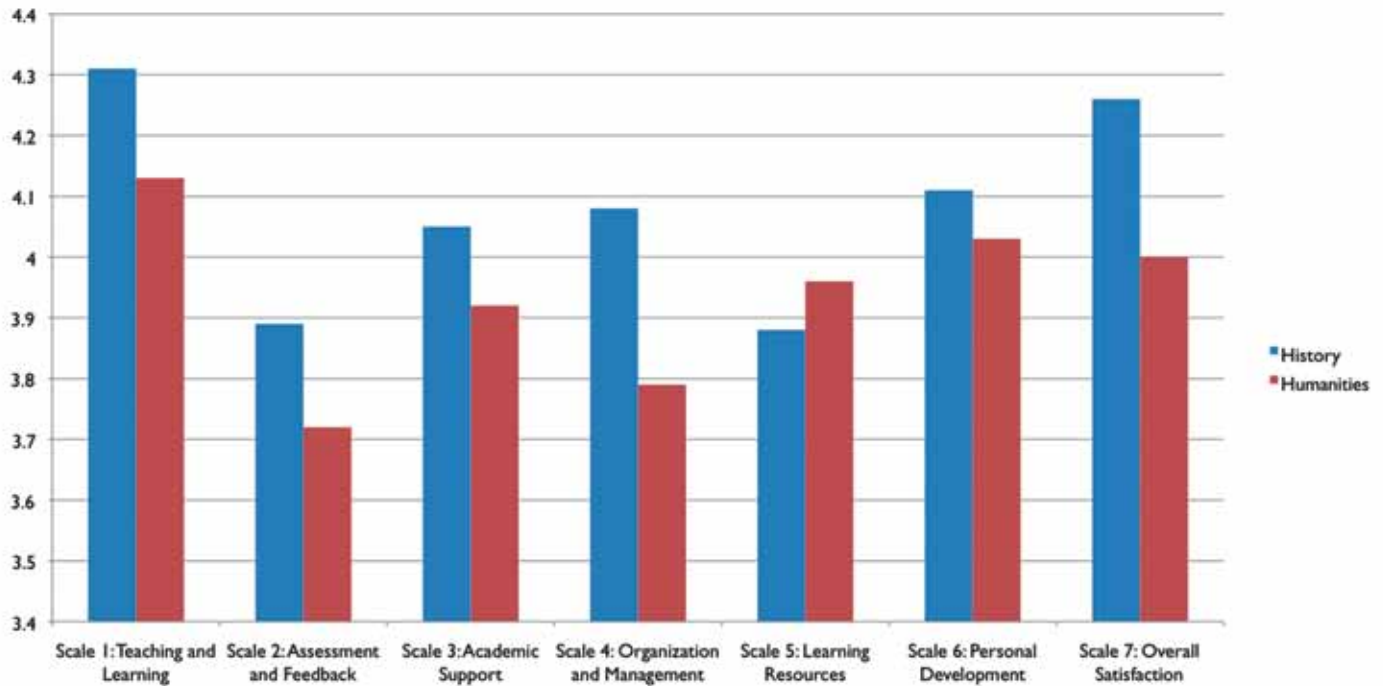


Figure 5 illustrates the average history results against average humanities results by scale.

It indicates particular strengths relative to the humanities overall lie in scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”), scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”), scale 4 (“Organization and management”) and scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”).

The only scale on which history departments were related lower than humanities departments is on scale 5 (“Learning resources”). Given that, as with figure 4, these results are repeated on the comparison with overall NSS scores (see figure 7 in section 1.4), this is suggestive of a pervasive sense of difficulty perceived by history students.

Figure 5: Comparison of History and Humanities Averages by Scale



1.3. HISTORY RESULTS COMPARED TO OVERALL NSS RESULTS

This section offers a comparative presentation of average history results and average results for all subjects across the NSS. It should be noted that there are a further 6 questions, which are asked only to NHS funded students (e.g. nursing and medical students), that have been excluded from this analysis.

Figure 6 compares average history responses with average responses for the overall NSS results.

The history responses are higher than overall NSS responses on all questions apart from question 16, question 17 and question 18. As earlier mentioned, this largely repeats the findings of section 1.4 which compared history responses with overall humanities responses. However, in the prior comparison history responses were higher than humanities response on question 18 (“I have been able to access specialized equipment, facilities or rooms when I need to”) whereas this is not the case on the present comparison. Therefore, it seems that a perceived problem area (provision of learning resources) for history students relative to other humanities students is underscored when compared to the overall NSS results. This can be seen again in the scale 5 (“Learning resources”) results on figure 7.

Figure 6: Comparison of History and Overall NSS Averages by Question

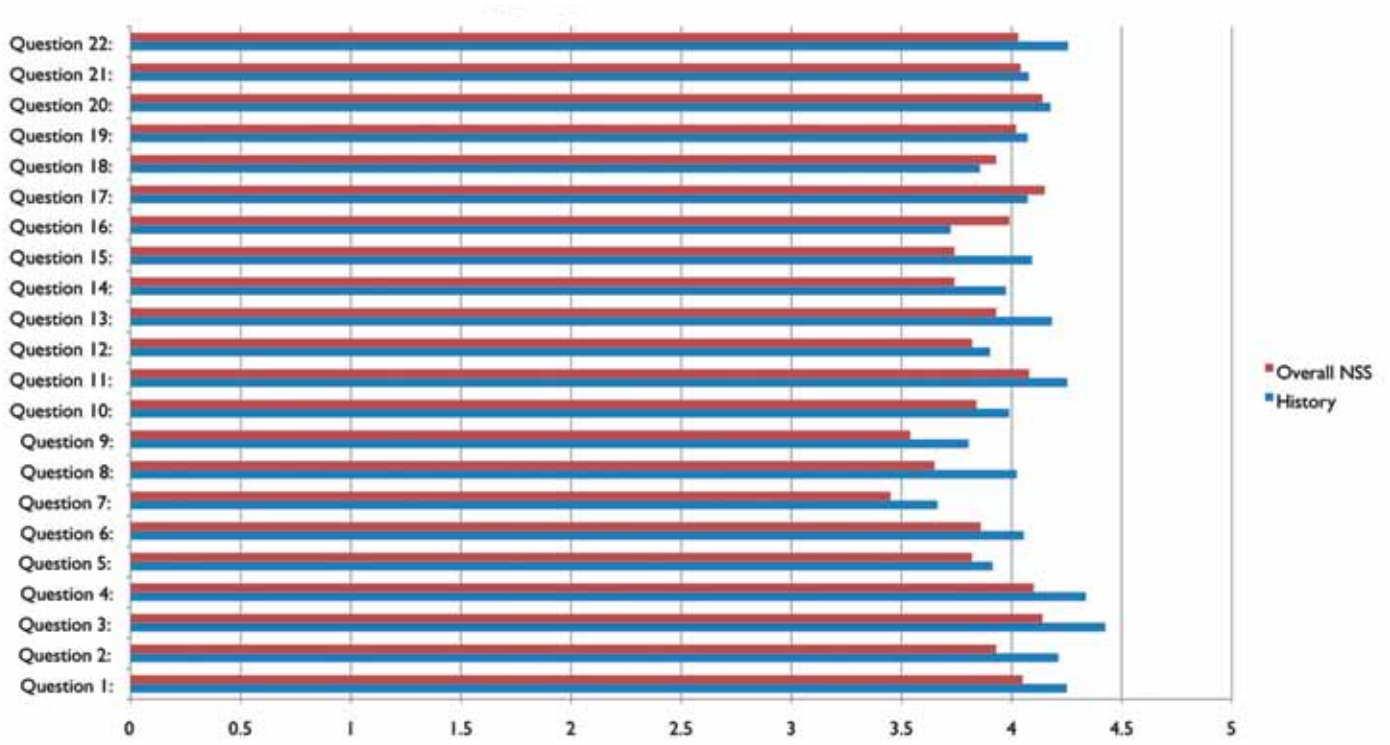
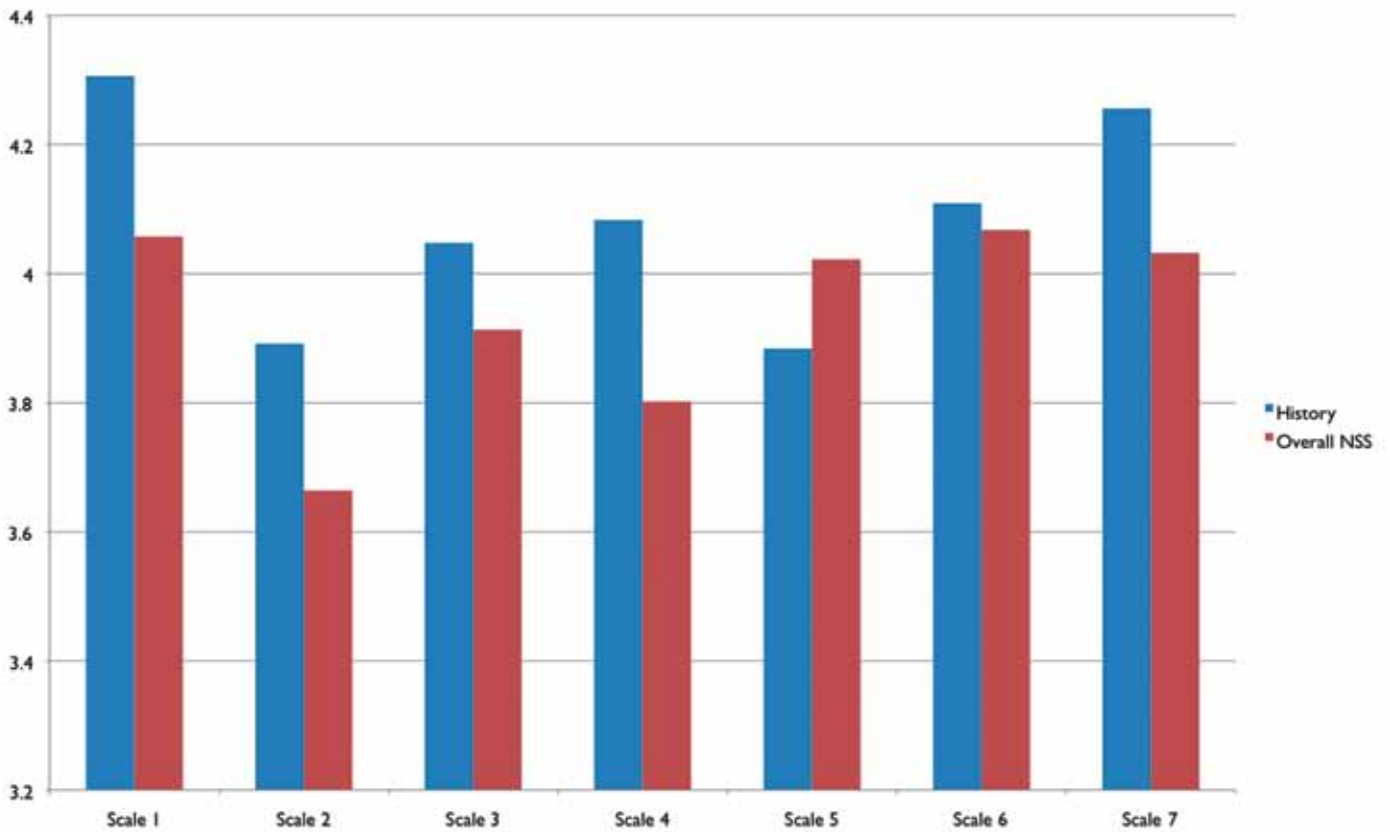


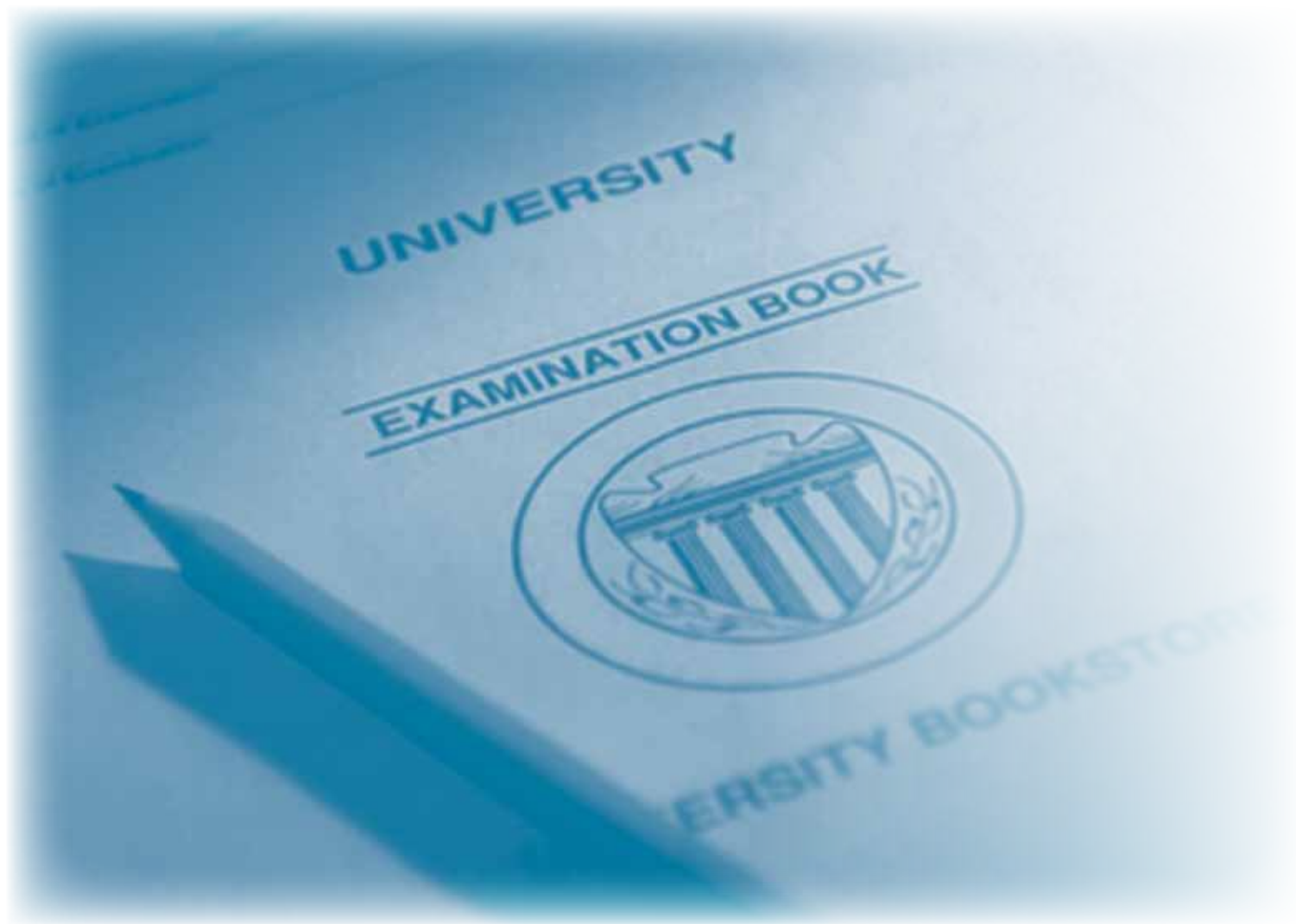
Figure 7: Comparison of History and Overall NSS Averages by Scale



2.1. HISTORY RESULTS BY INSTITUTIONAL GROUPING

The following tables present history subject results from the NSS dataset presented by institutional grouping (Russell Group, Million+, 1994 Group, University Alliance) along with the overall aggregated history results presented earlier in the report.

Figure 8 and figure 16 present results by question and by scale in table form. Figure 17 presents the average question response across the entire survey for each of the four institutional groupings. The bar charts used in sections 1.1, 1.2, 1.3 have been avoided in this section (as well as in the subsequent analysis of history results by region) because the quantity of data being presented rendered the charts prohibitively large. This section also includes a scale by scale breakdown of how history departments from different institutional groupings were rated on average for each question. These are presented in figure 9, figure 10, figure 11, figure 12, figure 13, figure 14 and figure 15.



A number of institutions were not represented in the History component of the NSS dataset. These missing institutions spanned all four categories of institutional grouping. In some cases, such as Imperial College London, this was clearly due to the absence of history degrees at a predominately science-based university. However, the reasons for many of the other omissions are unknown. While these numbers were relatively insignificant within the Russell Group, 1994 Group and University Alliance (two, four and two missing respectively) a total of fourteen institutions were missing from the Million+ grouping.

Figure 8: Average History Scores across Institutional Groupings by Question

Scale	Question	History Average	Russell Group	Million+	1994 Group	University Alliance Group
1 Teaching and Learning	1	4.25	4.19	4.21	4.33	4.21
	2	4.21	4.18	4.08	4.33	4.17
	3	4.43	4.38	4.40	4.53	4.40
	4	4.34	4.37	4.21	4.49	4.25
2 Assessment and Feedback	5	3.91	3.70	3.92	4.01	3.94
	6	4.05	3.93	4.02	4.17	4.06
	7	3.66	3.64	3.38	3.91	3.66
	8	4.02	3.79	3.93	4.15	4.07
	9	3.80	3.60	3.76	3.92	3.82
3 Academic Support	10	3.99	3.79	3.94	4.06	4.04
	11	4.25	4.25	4.13	4.36	4.27
	12	3.90	3.75	3.84	3.94	3.95
4 Organization and Management	13	4.18	4.25	3.97	4.33	4.18
	14	3.97	4.09	3.70	4.21	3.97
	15	4.09	4.08	3.94	4.32	4.06
5 Learning Resources	16	3.72	3.95	3.56	3.84	3.77
	17	4.07	4.20	3.89	4.12	4.20
	18	3.86	3.99	3.73	3.96	3.88
6 Personal Development	19	4.07	3.96	4.04	4.07	4.09
	20	4.18	4.10	4.16	4.18	4.15
	21	4.08	3.98	4.04	4.07	4.08
7 Overall Satisfaction	22	4.26	4.17	4.09	4.42	4.23

Figure 9: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 1 Questions)

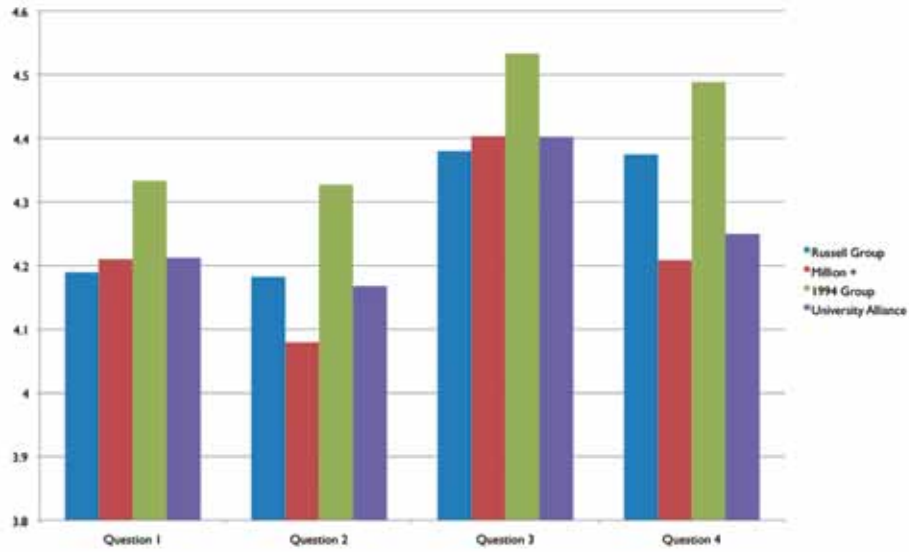


Figure 10: Comparative Score across Institutional Groupings (Scale 2 Questions)

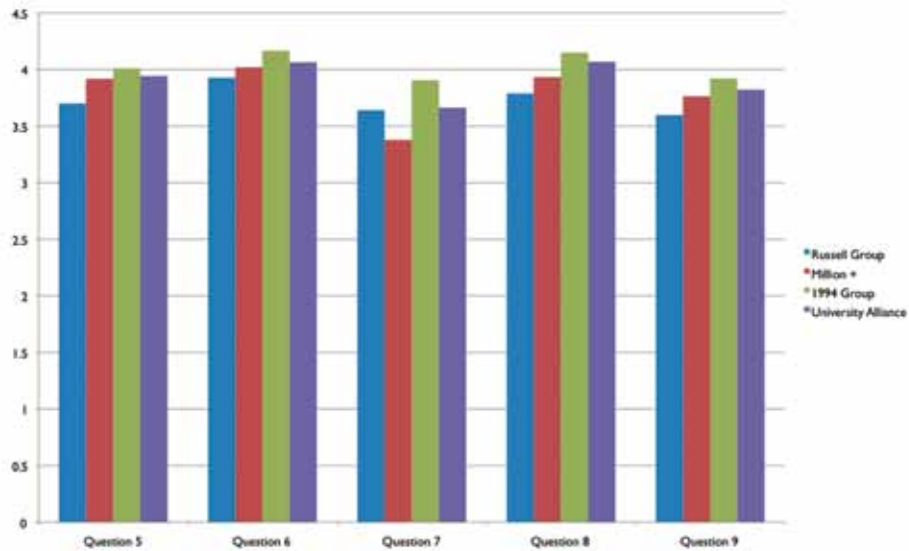


Figure 11: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 3 Questions)

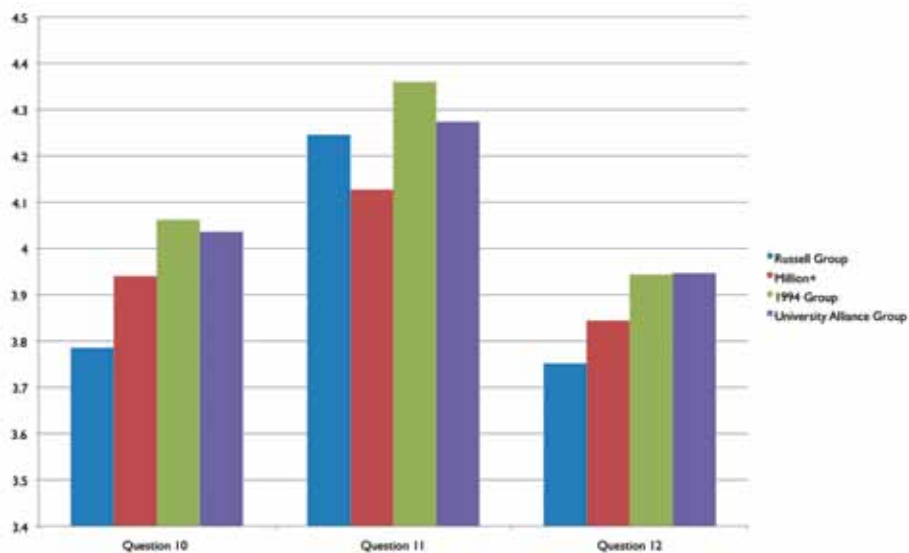


Figure 12: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 4 Questions)

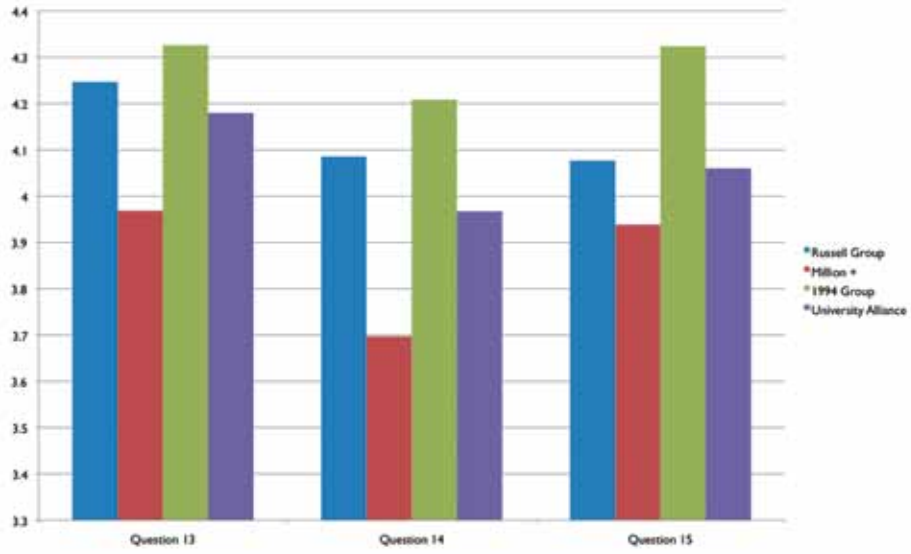


Figure 13: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 5 Questions)

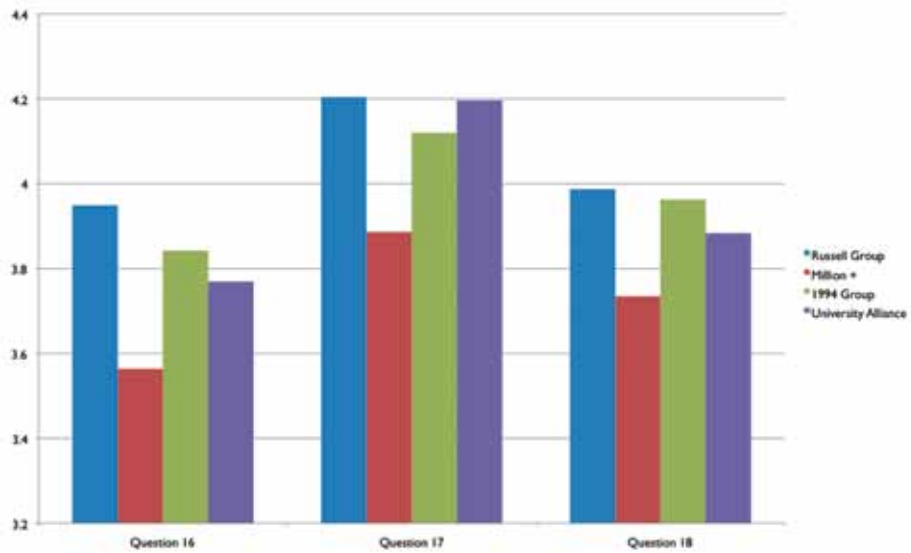


Figure 14: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 6 Questions)

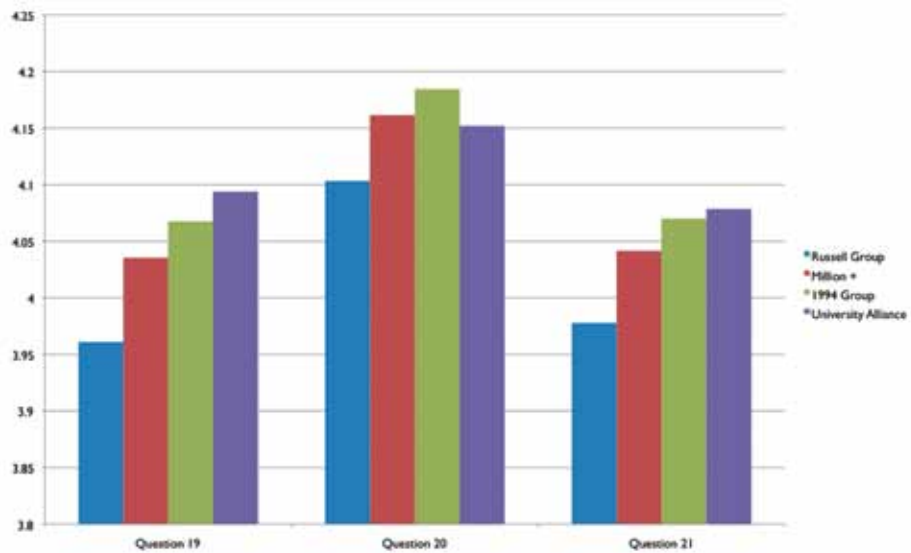


Figure 15: Comparative Scores across Institutional Groupings (Scale 7 Questions)

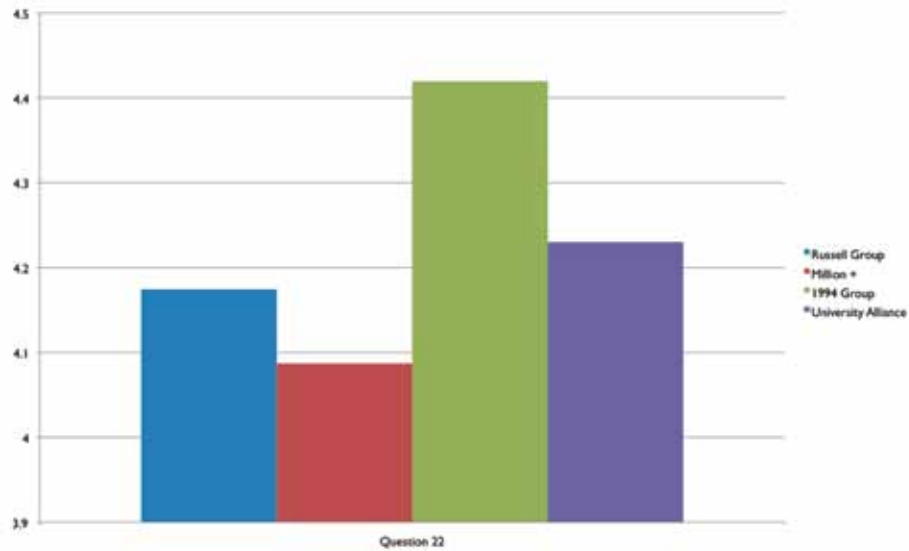
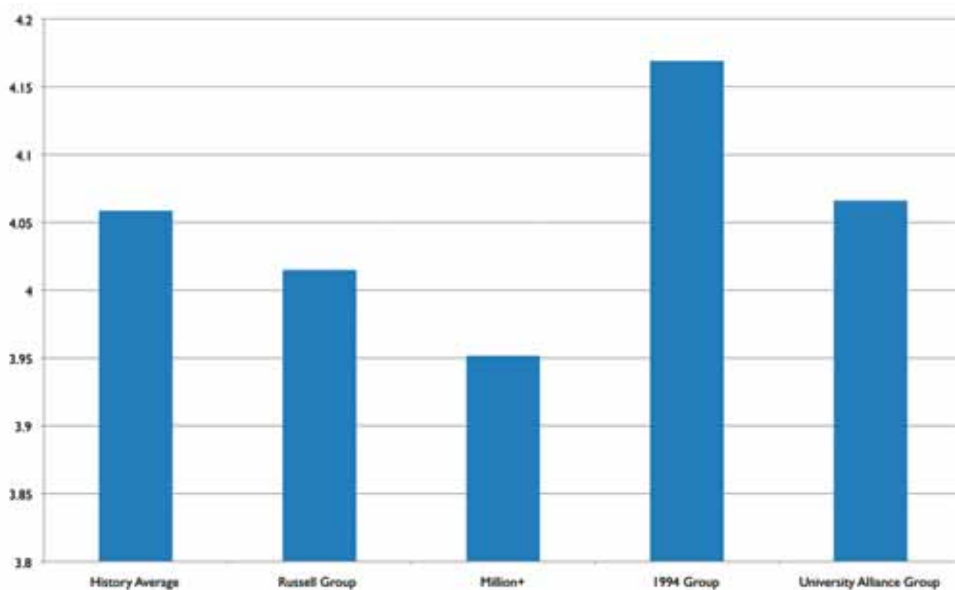


Figure 16: Average History Scores across Institutional Groupings by Scale

Scale	History Average	Russell Group	Million+	1994 Group	University Alliance Group
1 Teaching and Learning	4.31	4.28	4.23	4.42	4.26
2 Assessment and Feedback	3.89	3.73	3.80	4.03	3.91
3 Academic Support	4.05	3.93	3.97	4.12	4.09
4 Organization and Management	4.08	4.14	3.87	4.29	4.07
5 Learning Resources	3.88	4.05	3.73	3.98	3.95
6 Personal Development	4.11	4.01	4.08	4.11	4.11
7 Overall Satisfaction	4.26	4.17	4.09	4.42	4.23

Figure 17 presents the overall average question response across the four categories. History departments at Russell Group universities received a slightly lower average response than that for the overall aggregation of history departments. Russell Group departments receive the lowest overall average score on scale 2 (“Assessment and Feedback”), scale 3 (“Academic Support”) and scale 6 (“Personal Development”). Particularly low scores were received on question 7 (“Feedback on my work has been prompt”), question 8 (“I have received detailed comments on my work”), question 10 (“I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies”), question 12 (“Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices”), question 19 (“The course has helped me present myself with confidence”) and question 21 (“As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems”). However, they receive the highest overall average score on scale 5 (“Learning resources”) and second highest on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”). Particularly high average responses were gained for question 3 (“Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”), question 4 (“The course is intellectually stimulating”) and question 17 (“I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to”). This suggests a pervasive student experience of high quality teaching and resource rich institutional provision but a perceived lack of focus on the pastoral and intellectual development of students, which is perhaps explicable in terms of a great concentration of research activity at Russell Group universities.

Figure 17: History Scores across Institutional Groupings Average across All Questions



History departments at 1994 Group universities were scored most highly overall, with particular strengths on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”). Particularly high average scores are received on question 3 (“Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”), question 4 (“The course is intellectually stimulating”) and question 22 (“Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”). 1994 Group departments have the highest average scores on all but two scales. They score equally on scale 6 (“Personal development”) with University Alliance departments and score slightly lower than Russell Group universities on scale 5 (“Learning resources”). Relatively lower scores were received by 1994 group departments on question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”), question 19 (“The course has helped me present myself with confidence”) and question 21 (“As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems”).

Departments at Million+ universities receive their highest average on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and their lowest on scale 5 (“Learning resources”). Their average scores per scale were lowest on all but three scales; on scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”), scale 3 (“Academic support”) and scale 6 (“Personal development”) they were second lowest after Russell Group departments. A particular high average score was received on question 3 (“Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”). Particularly low average scores were received on question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”) and question 18 (“I have been able to access specialized equipment, facilities or rooms when I needed to”).

History departments at University Alliance group institutions received their highest average response on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and their lowest average response on scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”). A particularly high average score was received on question 3 (“Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”) and a particularly low score was received on question 7 (“Feedback on my work has been prompt”).

3.1. HISTORY RESULTS BY REGION

The following sections presents history subject results from the NSS dataset broken down on a region by region basis. Figure 18, figure 19, figure 20, figure 21, figure 22, figure 23 and figure 24 present this comparative analysis on a scale by scale basis along with the average score for that scale calculated from the aggregated history responses. The main focus of the analysis which follows is on specific regions (Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland) with different higher educational structures in place. A number of institutions were not represented in the History component of the NSS dataset. The precise reason or each of these omissions is unknown but most presumably stem either from the absence of history degrees at that particular institution or extraneous reasons pertaining to the respective student body's completion of the NSS.

History departments from Northern Ireland received the lowest average responses on scale 1 ("Teaching and learning"), scale 2 ("Assessment and feedback") and scale 6 ("Personal development"). However, such departments received the second highest average responses on scale 5 ("Learning resources") suggesting a particular strength relative to the perceptions recorded across departments in other regions (with the notable exception of East England).

History departments from Scotland received relatively high responses on scale 1 ("Teaching and learning"), scale 4 ("Organization and management") and scale 7 ("Overall satisfaction"). The average response on scale 7 for Scottish departments was the second highest across all regions suggesting a particular regional strength. Other average scale responses for Scottish departments were in the middle of the range across all regions.

History departments from Wales predominately received average responses on a par with the average for history departments overall. The strongest relative score was on scale 7 ("Overall satisfaction") and the weakest on scale 5 ("Learning resources").

Figure 18: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 1 Questions)

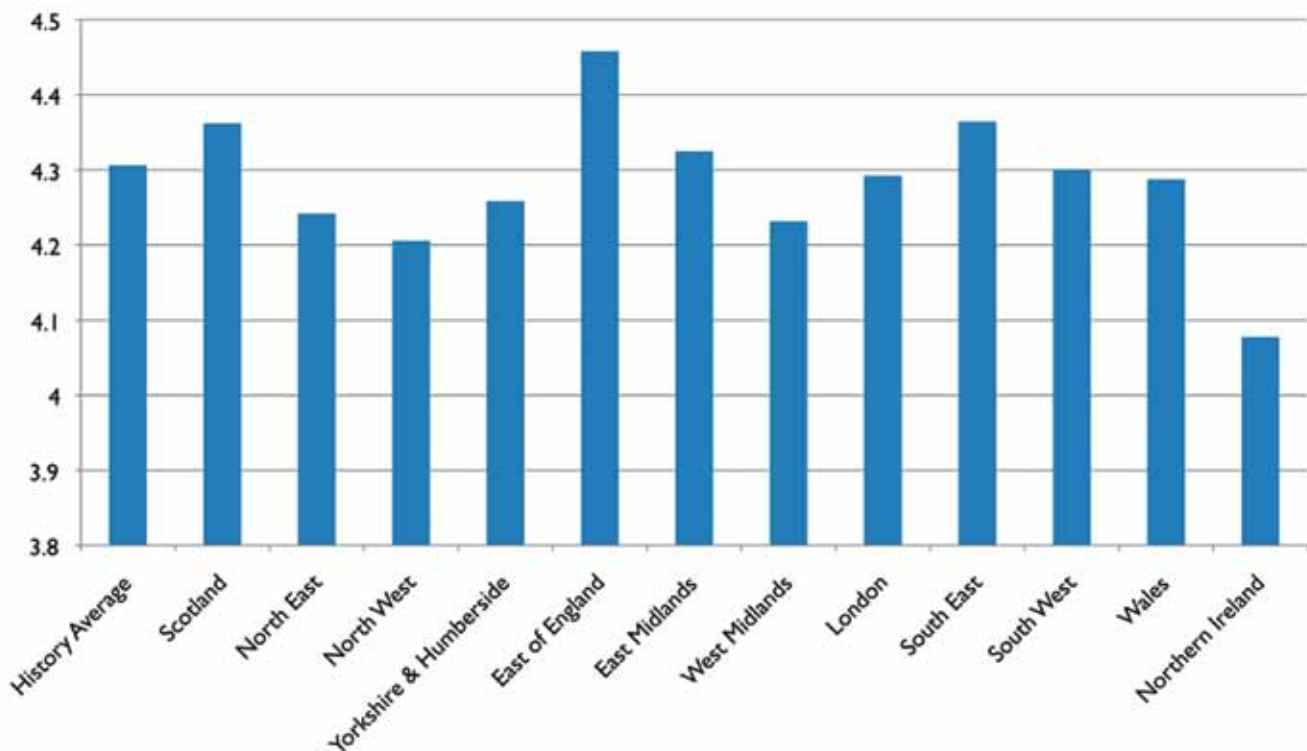


Figure 19: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 2 Questions)

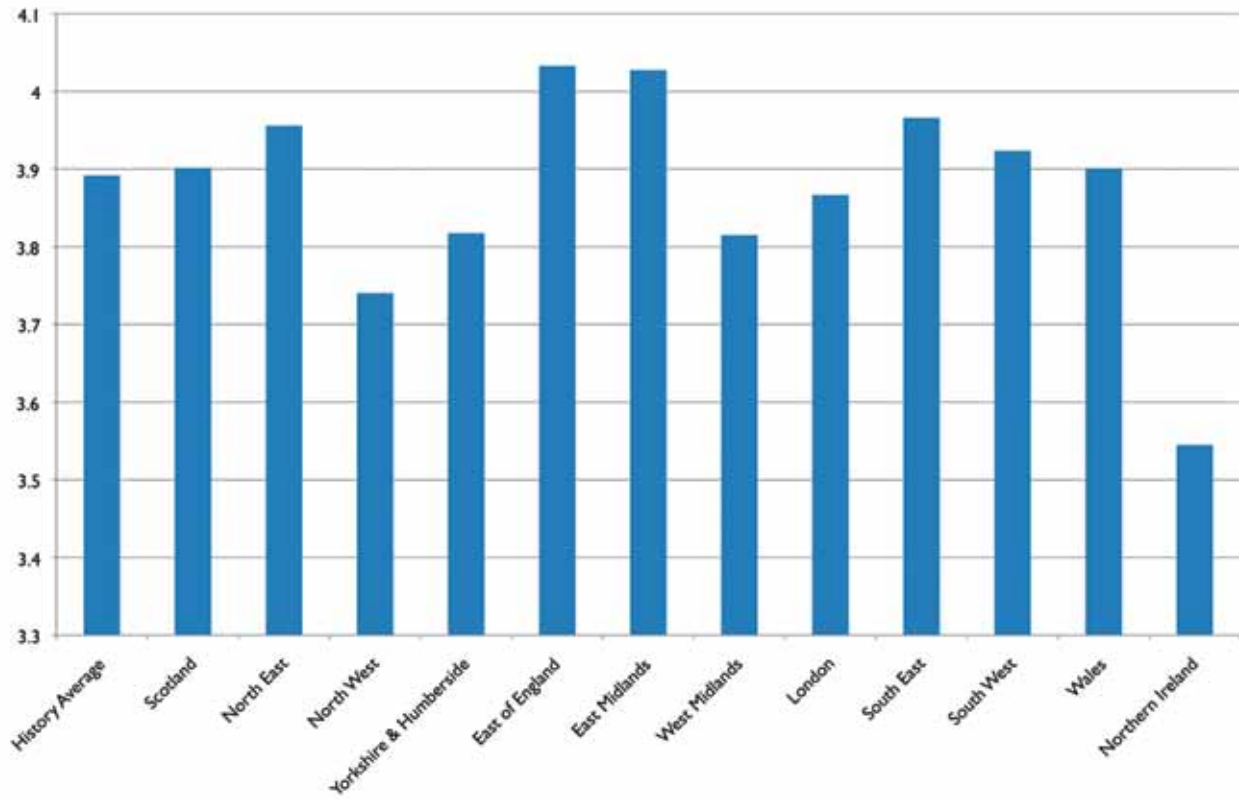


Figure 20: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 3 Questions)

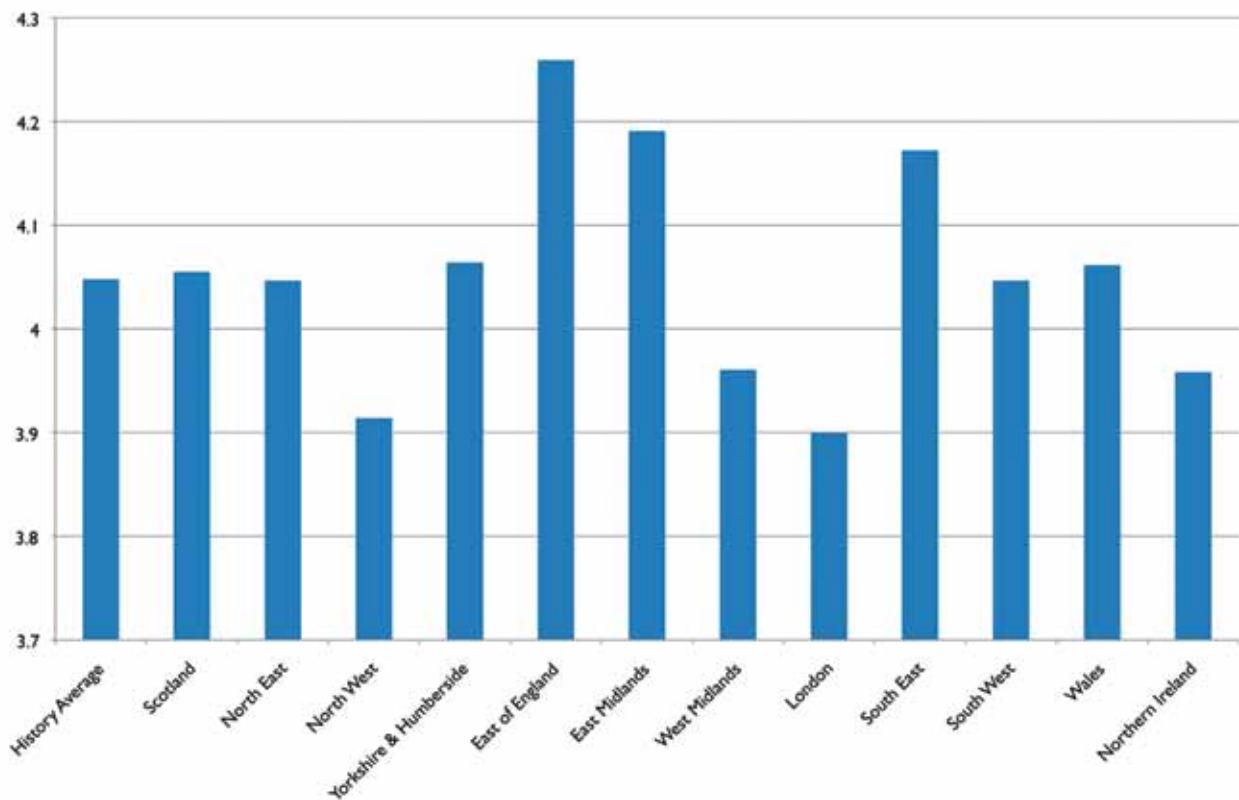


Figure 21: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 4 Questions)

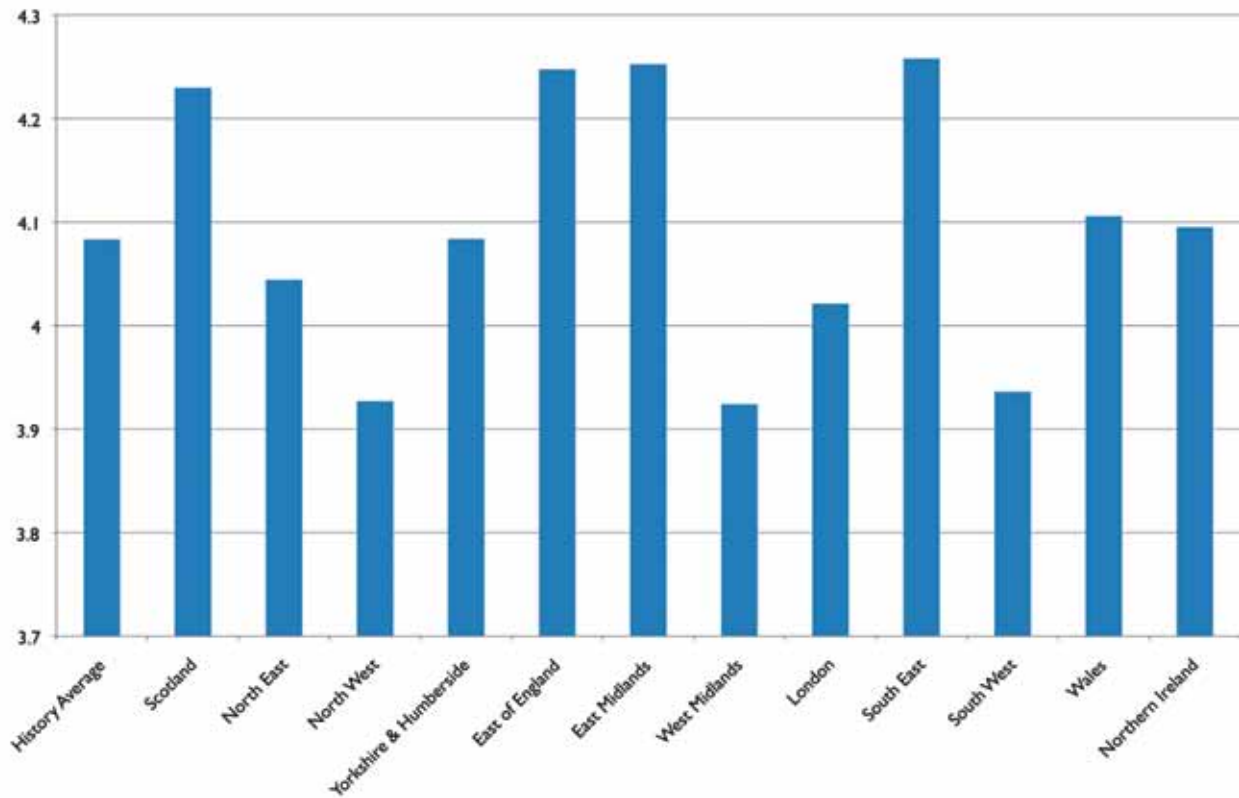


Figure 22: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 5 Questions)

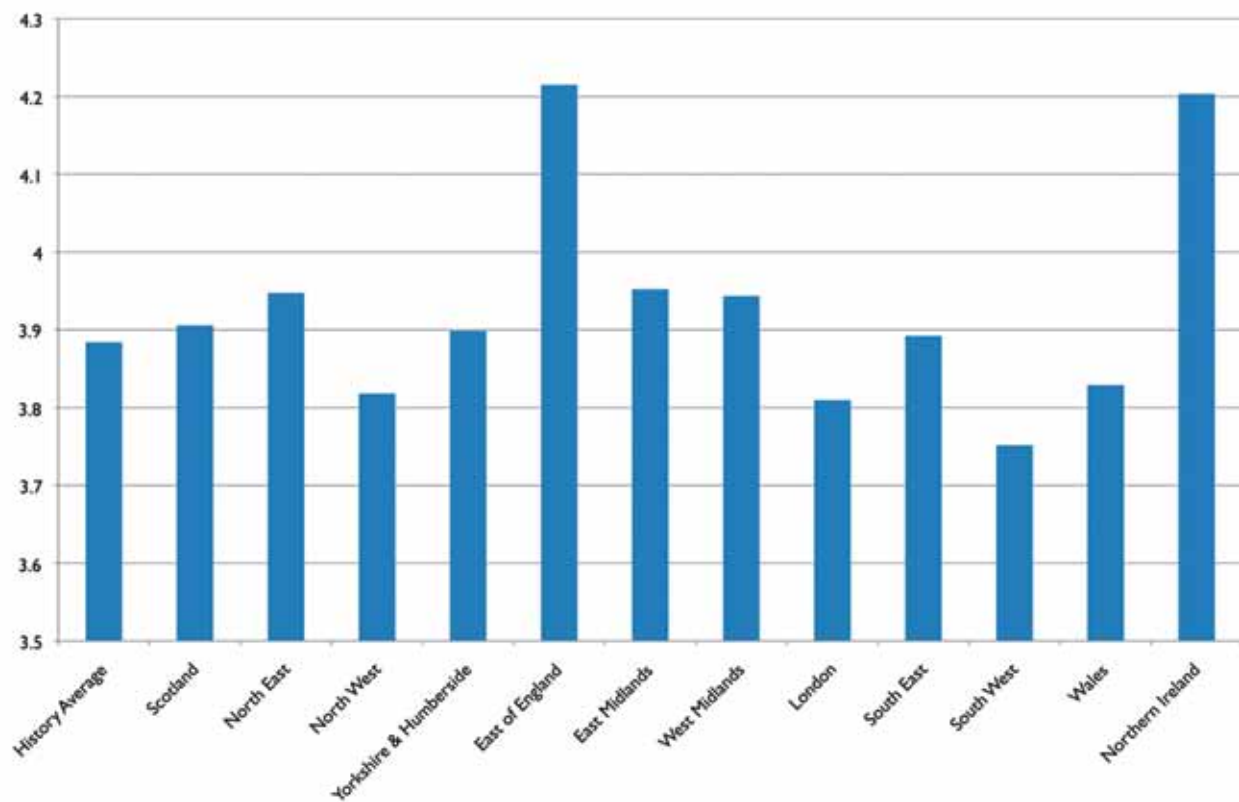


Figure 23: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 6 Questions)

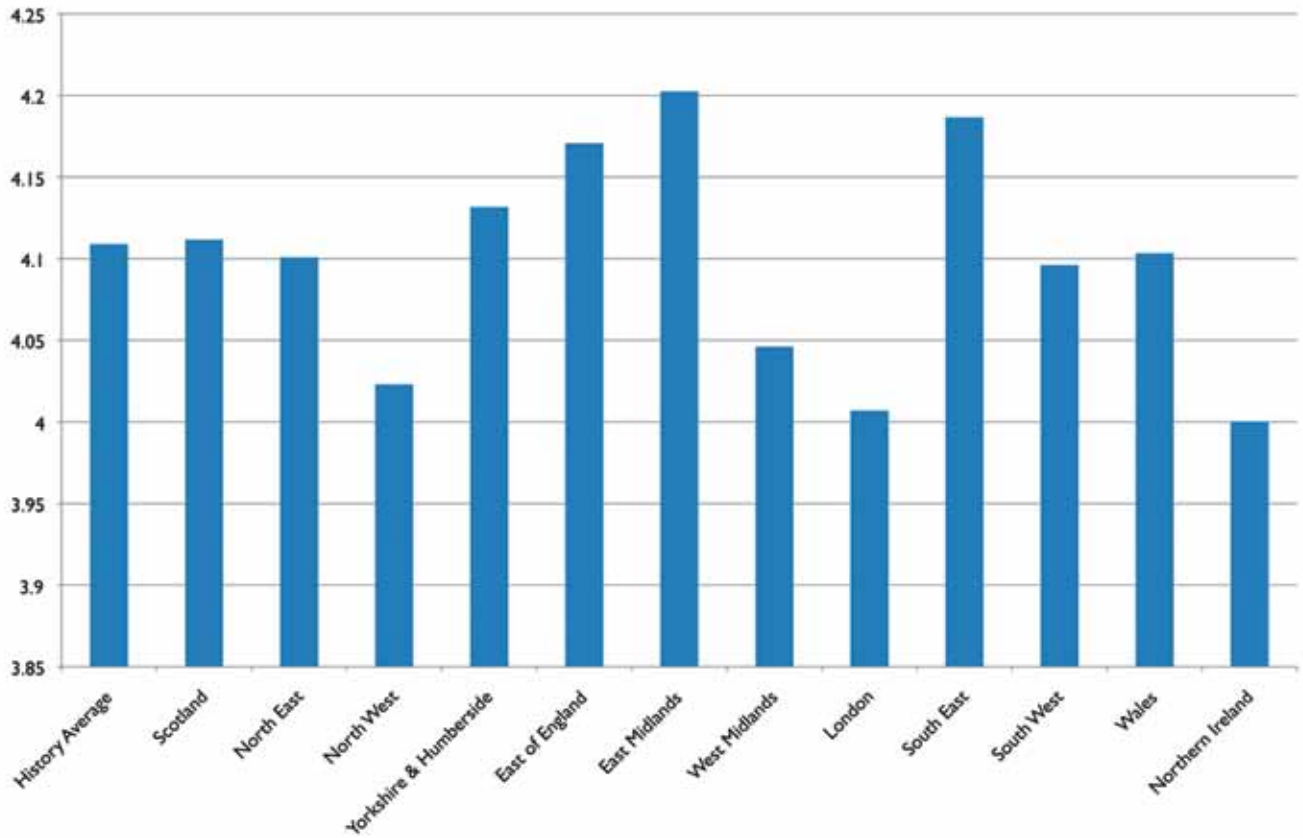
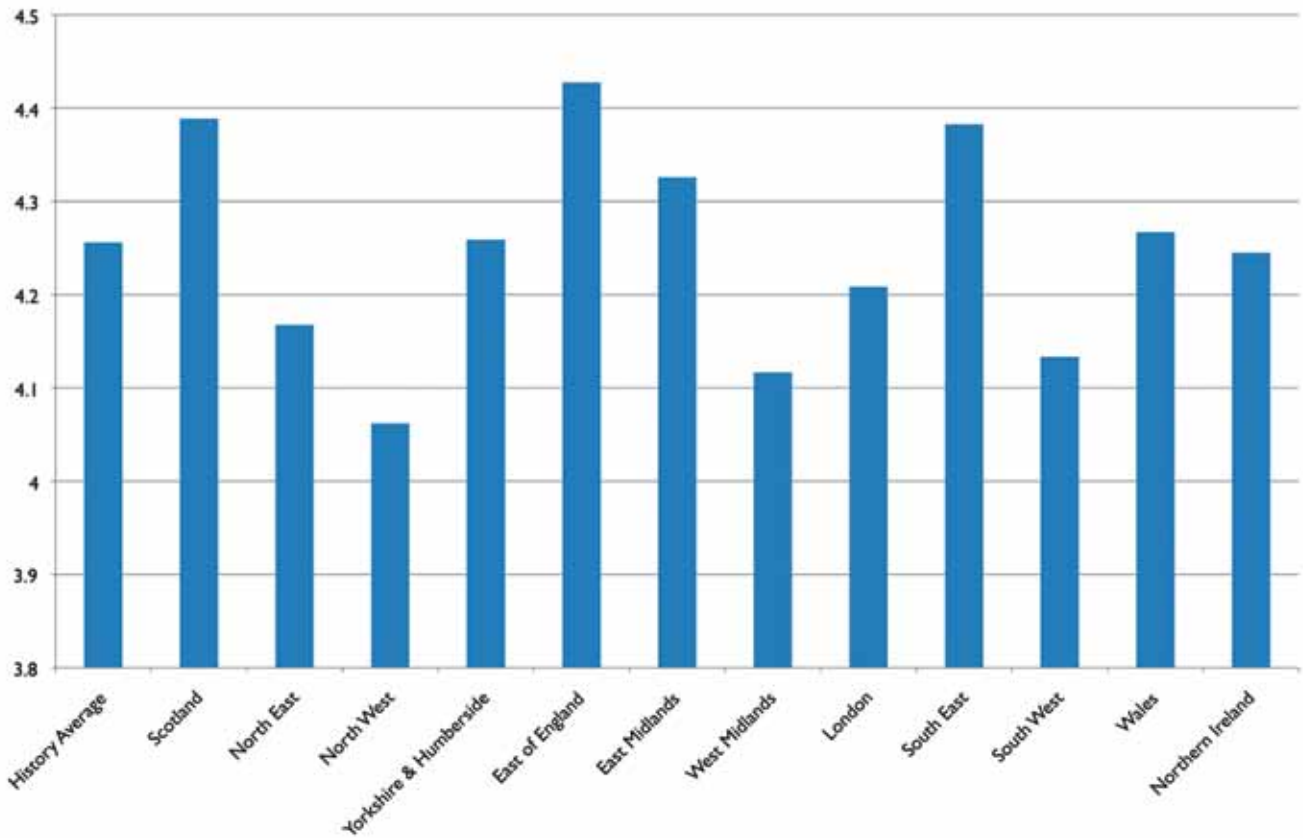


Figure 24: Comparative Averages by Region (Scale 7 Questions)



4.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

1. Particular strengths for history departments across the NSS are question 1 (“Staff are good at explaining things”), question 3 (“Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching”), question 4 (“The course is intellectually stimulating), question 11 (“I have been able to contact staff when I needed to”) and question 22 (“Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course”).
2. Particular weaknesses for history departments across the NSS are question 7 (“Feedback on my work has been prompt”) and question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”).
3. Average history responses stand above average humanities responses on all but question 16 (“The library resources and services are good enough for my needs”) and question 17 (“I have been able to access general IT resources when I needed to”).
4. Average history responses are higher than comparable average overall NSS responses on all but scale 5 (“Learning resources”).
5. There is a pervasive perception amongst respondents from history departments that provision of learning resources is poor. This can be seen relative in average history responses relative to both average humanities responses and average overall NSS responses.
6. The elite status of Russell Group universities is not reflected in the average NSS responses history departments at such institutions received relative to departments at other institutional groupings. Russell Group departments receive the lowest overall average score on scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”), scale 3 (“Academic support”) and scale 6 (“Personal development”). However, they receive the highest overall average score on scale 5 (“Learning resources”) and second highest on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”).
7. History departments at 1994 Group universities received higher average scores per scale than Russell Group universities. They score most strongly overall with particular strengths on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”).
8. History departments at Million+ Group universities received their highest average on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and their lowest on scale 5 (“Learning resources”).
9. History departments at University Alliance Group universities received their highest average response on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”) and their lowest average response on scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”).
10. History departments from Northern Ireland received the lowest average responses on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”), scale 2 (“Assessment and feedback”) and scale 6 (“Personal development”). However, such departments received the second highest average responses on scale 5 (“Learning resources”) suggesting a particular strength relative to the perceptions recorded across departments in other regions (with the notable exception of East England).
11. History departments from Scotland received relatively high responses on scale 1 (“Teaching and learning”), scale 4 (“Organization and management”) and scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”). The average response on scale 7 for Scottish departments was the second highest across all regions suggesting a particular regional strength.
12. History departments from Wales received their highest average responses on scale 7 (“Overall satisfaction”) and the lowest on scale 5 (“Learning resources”).



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